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The Archaeology of Petronius: Engaging a Social Science with Literature[1]

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The title of this paper, as it appears here, is loaded, purposely so. It therefore requires some definitions and clarifications.

I do not think I need to define literature. It extends to any type of published – to a certain extent also unpublished – writing intended to entertain, to teach, to explain, to express one's feelings, and so on. The object of our scrutiny is the single surviving piece of entertaining literature by Petronius, a first-century AD Latin writer.

In the title I have qualified archaeology as a social science. I think this is the first time I am doing so, apart from another occasion, an oration I gave for a graduation ceremony at the University of Malta some ten years ago. It was a time when the combination of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Malta was being mooted, possibly as a department within a foreseeable Faculty of Social Sciences which never materialized. Every year, in my introductory study unit for the undergraduate course in Archaeology I challenge my students to ask themselves whether this discipline is a science, or a humanity.[2] We always come to the conclusion that it is both: it is concerned with the human being (like Anthropology), but projected into the past (like History), but it makes use of all sorts of applications and techniques provided by the hard sciences and it itself applies a certain amount of scientific procedures and reasoning, like the testing of hypotheses. Its shortest definition could be the following: that discipline that searches for the material evidence of past human existence and activity and exploits that evidence to reconstruct the way of life, social interaction, and beliefs of our ancestors, as well as their relationship with the world around them. This is the archaeology that has emerged over the

1 The following is a revised version of a public lecture delivered to the Malta Classics Association on 17 February 2012.

2 Thomas (1998) 29.

last century-and-a-half, since Heinrich Schliemann set out to discover Troy, and as it has been refined since then.[3]

This is the same type of archaeology that I sought in my lecture titled "*L-Arkeoloġija f'Dun Karm*" in 1987, an updated version of which was published in a collection of texts of similar lectures on Dun Karm, Malta's national poet, with the title *Studji Dunkarmjani*.[4]

The type of archaeology that I shall be seeking in Petronius is different. The concept of archaeology as we know it, and as defined above, did not exist before the mid-19th century, even though the term 'archaeology' (*archaiologia*) was used already in Classical times, even in titles of books, like the *Rhomaike Archaiologia* of Dionysius of Halicarnassus (1st *c.* BC) and the *Judaike Archaiologia* of Josephus Flavius (1st *c.* AD). The archaeology I shall be looking for is of this ancient type, closer in meaning to antiquarianism and the concept of '*antiquitates*' as used in Varro's *Antiquitates Rerum Humanarum et Divinarum* (1st *c.* BC).

Petronius is one of the Latin texts I read with my students following the Classics programme at the University of Malta, the other being Book 6 of the *Commentaries* of Caesar, better known as the *Gallic Wars*. The *Satyricon*, a picaresque novel in prose, is the only extant work by Petronius, the *arbiter elegantiae* in the court of Emperor Nero (AD 54–68). Its attribution to Petronius is made on reliable grounds and supported by circumstantial evidence.[5]

Those of my age remember that in 1969, *Federico Fellini* produced a film, the *Fellini Satyricon*, which was somewhat loosely based upon the book. Among the adaptations that Fellini makes in his production is a fight with a minotaur in a labyrinth that was clearly inspired by the standing remains of Ħaġar Qim or some other of the Maltese prehistoric temples; this is followed by another scene dominated by a colossal statue replicating one of the squatting corpulent statuettes from Ħaġar Qim. In 1968, the year before Fellini's film, another film

3 Renfrew and Bahn (2012) 21-48.

4 Bonanno (2011) 103-127.

5 Smith (1975) xi-xxvii.

had already been produced, by Gian Luigi Polidoro, hence the addition of the name Fellini to the 1969 title.

It should be kept in mind that in my youth – we are talking of the 1960s – the *Satyricon* was, if not *de facto* listed in the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* of the Catholic Church, very close to being so. That meant that its reading was not encouraged, to say the least. It abounds in vulgarities and eroticism, although, compared to contemporary literature, its stigma for pornography pales to an insignificant hue. Partly because of this alleged pornographic content, the only section that was considered to qualify for sharing with young minds in the Classics Department of the then Royal University of Malta was the episode of the *Banquet of Trimalchio*, the *Cena Trimalchionis*. The other reason was that this episode stands on its own, it has a beginning and an end. It is a story within a story.

The Plot

For the purposes of this lecture, my search for the archaeology of Petronius will be limited to precisely this episode.[6] As its title implies, it deals with a particularly lavish banquet given by the *nouveau riche* Trimalchio, a former slave who has accumulated an enormous fortune, an upstart in the society of a Greek south Italian city around the reign of Nero, that is, around AD 60, the year of the shipwreck of St Paul on Maltese shores. The heroes, or anti-heroes, of the *Satyricon* are two young men, Encolpius and Ascyltos, both characterised by ambivalent sexual inclinations. Along the unfolding of the novel, both share the services of a young good-looking male slave, Giton, who in the account of the *Banquet* hardly makes an appearance. The narrator (Encolpius) and his friend are invited to this evening meal through the favours of Agamemnon, a freedman who teaches oratory and rhetoric to young lawyers and who now has his own slaves and an assistant tutor (an *antescholanus*). Indeed, all the other invitees belong to this class of former slaves, some of whom have also made a fortune, mainly

6 All the following quotations from the text of the *Cena*, are taken from Smith's edition (1975).

through inheritance.[7] One member of this social rank, Chrestion by name, is recorded in a Maltese inscription of Early Imperial times as the procurator of Augustus, probably looking after the latter's properties in Malta and Gozo. He sponsored the restoration of a temple of Proserpina in Malta.[8]

The Story

The story of the dinner party begins to unfold when the invitees come across their host Trimalchio, a bald old man, playing ball outside with some long-haired boys. A servant, one of two eunuchs, holds a silver chamber-pot (*matella*) ready for use by his master. Surely enough, at the crack of Trimalchio's fingers the chamber-pot is submitted to him and he relieves himself shamelessly in full view. The chamber-pot, whether of precious metal or otherwise, forms a quite frequent motif in the *Cena Trimalchionis*. Further on, one of the guests, Hermeros, will upbraid Giton and compare him to a mouse in a chamber-pot (*tamquam mus in matella*). At this point I have to confess my inadequate familiarity with Roman chamber-pots, both ceramic and metal ones. Given their obvious utility and frequent use, they seem to be, to me at least, conspicuous by their absence in the Roman ceramic repertoire with which archaeologists have to contend. We are spared, thankfully I would add, the representation of the use of this apparatus in art, especially in narrative sculpture, in which I can make a modest claim for expertise.

This, I must state, was the state of affairs before a short visit two fellow archaeologists and I paid to western Sicily in January 2012. There, in the archaeological museum of Marsala (ancient Lilybaeum), I noticed two pots which in ordinary archaeological jargon are referred to as

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7 On freedmen see Mouritsen (2011) and the collection of essays edited by Bell and Ramsby (2012).

8 *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* X, 7494. Now more easily accessible on the web in EDR (Epigraphic Database Rome) no. 112568 (http://www.edr-edr.it/edr_programmi/res_complexcomune.php?do=book&id_nr=&provinz=&land=M&fo_antik=&Bibliografia=&Testo=&booltesto=AND&Testo2=&bool= AND&ordinamento=fo_modern&javasi=javascriptsi&se_foto=tutte&lang=eng (accessed 09/07/2014).

'sombrero pots', but to me they look so similar to old glazed chamber pots that they must have been precisely that, chamber pots (fig. 1). It is not certain whether a vessel of the same shape, and apparently of the same size, illustrated by Temi Zammit among a series of objects he retrieved from a rock-cut tomb at Taċ-Ċagħqi in Rabat, is also a chamber pot.[9]

Fig. 1: Chamber pots from a shipwreck in Marsala Museum

From here the narrator and the other guests move into the bath. The one liner that follows illustrates faithfully the typical Roman, sauna-like, bathing ritual, passing from the steaming-hot room (*caldarium*) to the cold dip in the *frigidarium* (*sudore calfacti momento temporis ad frigidam eximus*). But more on private baths towards the end of the story. Since Trimalchio is carried from the bath to his house in a litter, we assume that this is a private *balneum*, not his own, and that it is some distance away from his house.

Our heroes follow him in the company of Agamemnon and come to the entrance of his house. We are not given a description of any sort of the layout of Trimalchio's house, such as we have of the luxurious villas of Cicero[10] and Pliny the Younger,[11] and the rural versions of the same in Cato, Varro, Vitruvius and Columella.[12] But at the entrance we experience a scene with which we are familiar as a result of archaeological discoveries, mainly in the Vesuvian cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Encolpius, the narrator, almost falls backwards and

9 T. Zammit, Notebook IV 32-33; Zammit (1913) 9; Sagona (2002) 1031-32, fig. 181.9.

10 McCracken (1935).

11 Pliny *Ep.*2.17; 5.6.

12 Cato *Agr.* 10-22; Varro *Rust.*1.13; Vitr. *De Arch.*6. 6; Columella *Rust.*1.6.

breaks his legs because he spots a huge dog tied to a chain. It soon turns out not to be a real one but a painted one on the wall together with the words '*cave canem*'. This corresponds exactly to an identical image on a floor mosaic in Pompeii (fig. 2).

In this instance, however, the whole wall seems to have been painted with various episodes from the life of the owner of the house. The first one depicts an intricate scene of a slave-market in which young Trimalchio, still sporting long hair (*capillatus*) and carrying the

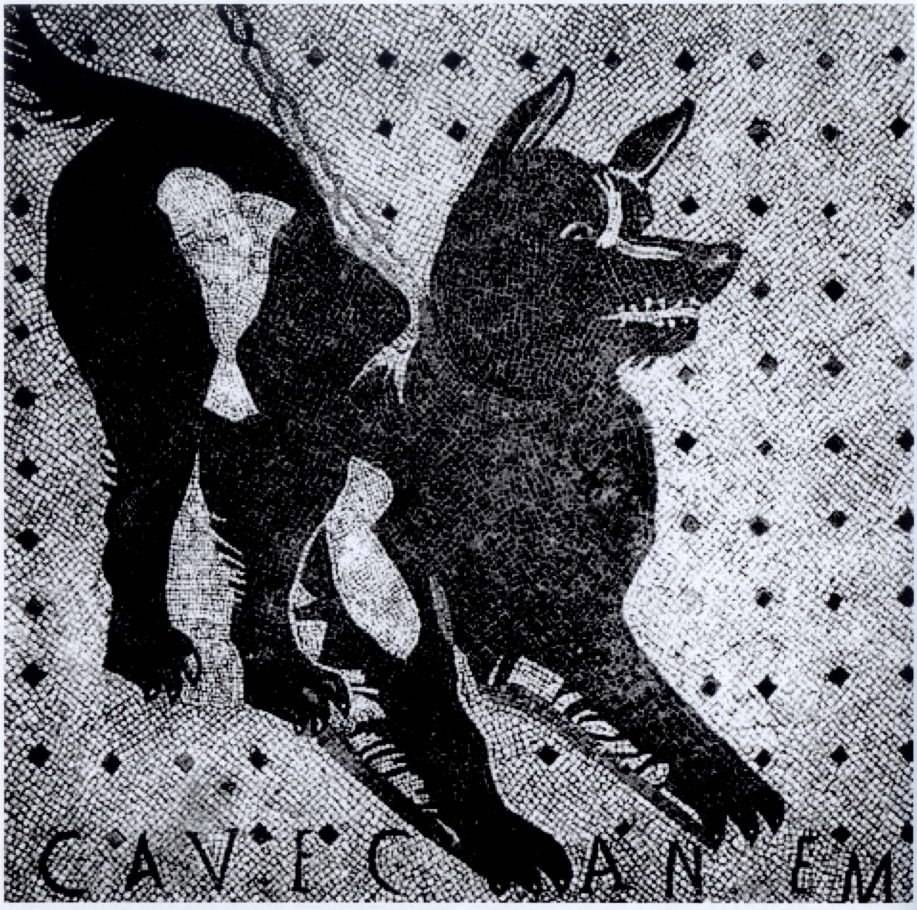

Fig. 2: 'cave canem' mosaic at the House of the Tragic Poet, Pompeii

caduceus (Mercury's staff),[13] is being led into Rome by Minerva. The last scene shows him on a Sevir's throne accompanied by Fortune and the three Fates. The Seviri Augitales were a body of priests of freedmen extraction who looked after the cult of Emperor Augustus at the *vicus* (or quarter) level. As far as I know, no such painted biographies survive on any wall in the Vesuvian towns.

Encolpius then sees in a corner a large cupboard with a shrine containing silver statuettes of the Lares (the household gods, like the much more modest terracotta ones Maximus the Gladiator used to carry around, and religiously buried in the arena of the Colosseum by his colleague in the final moving scene of the film *Gladiator*). Also a marble image of Venus, possibly like the nude one, represented in the act of untying her sandal, from a house in Pompeii, a fragmentary replica of which is housed in Malta's National Museum of Archaeology. I do not think any archaeologist has yet come across a golden box containing the first beard of its owner, like the one Encolpius sees (it is not clear whether real or depicted) in the same context.

On enquiring what the paintings in the hall are, Encolpius is told that they illustrate the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, as well as a gladiatorial show. Scenes from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are found depicted on the internal walls of several houses both in the Vesuvian area and elsewhere.[14] Gladiatorial scenes are much rarer as paintings on walls, much commoner on floor mosaics, such as the one in the villa of Nennig in Germany.[15]

At the entrance to the dining room Encolpius is astonished to see *fasces*, topped with axes, fixed on the door posts, a part of which ends in a warship's beak in bronze (*embolum navis aeneum*) with an inscription saying that it was donated to Trimalchio by his steward

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13 A similar caduceus appears on Roman bronze coins minted in Malta, but its symbolism in the Maltese context is still not clear. See Perassi and Novarese (2006) 2388-2391. It prompted E. Coleiro (1971) to identify the male head with which it shares the obverse as the god Eshmun, the Punic counterpart of the Roman Mercury.

14 Such as the wall paintings from a house on the Esquiline hill in Rome, now in the Vatican Museum: Strong (1990) 69-70, figs 27-28.

15 Smith (1983) 131, fig. 103. For painted gladiatorial fights see Clarke (2003) 143-145, figs 91-92.

Cinnamus. *Fasces* were symbols of office of lictors, attendants on Roman magistrates, including the Seviri Augustales, a college of priests of which Trimalchio was a member. They are depicted on several Roman historical reliefs, including the South processional frieze of the Ara Pacis Augustae, the fragmentary Ara Pietatis of Claudius, on both of the Cancelleria reliefs (now in the Vatican Museum), and on the panel of the Arch of Titus showing the triumphal procession. Archaeological history has been made by the recent discovery of ten real rostra, the bronze beaks of Roman warships, fished out of the sea off the Egadi Islands, where a famous sea battle was fought between the Roman and Carthaginian navies in 241 BC.[16]

The guests finally enter the dining room and are assigned specific places in the typical Roman reclining fashion on one of three couches (Greek *klynai*) placed on three sides of a central table, which gave rise to the name to the typical Roman dining room (the *triclinium*). The guests are regaled with a sequence of lavish and extravagant food courses interspersed with equally extravagant and often distasteful shows. From the account given by Encolpius of the contributions made by individual guests to the running conversation one can reconstruct the position occupied by each of the.

Of course there is a huge lot of references to a wide range of antiquities in the unfolding of the account of the banquet, ranging from Mother Earth and astrology, to calendars, exotic food products, to bronze household items (*Corinthea*), children's education, gladiatorial games, a type of betting that survives to our days (the *morra*), and so on. But space is limited and I shall focus on a few instances with an archaeological connotation. Some of these involve representations of gods or mythical figures.

One of the first courses is served on a dish that has four figures of Marsyas at the corners, which let a sauce run from their wine-skins over fishes. Marsyas was a wild satyrical figure in Greek mythology who ended up tragically, skinned to death as a punishment for challenging *Apollo* to a contest of music. Perhaps the most famous representations of him, apart from statues in the round showing him with hands tied

16 Zangara (2012). *http://www.ox.ac.uk/media/news_releases_for_journalists/130405.html* (accessed 09/07/2014)

above his head, waiting for his ordeal, are those at the corners of the *anaglypha Traiani*, marble screens carrying scenes from the political career of the Emperor Trajan, carved in relief, now housed in the Curia building in the Roman Forum.[17] Here the statue of Marsyas shows him carrying a full wine-skin on his shoulder.

Fig. 3: Statue of Priapus in Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

A dish of confectionaries is presented to the guests towards the end of the sequence. In its middle it has a statuette of Priapus, the god of nature's abundance, holding all kinds of fruits and grapes on his capacious raised apron in the usual iconography (fig. 3).[18] Immediately after, figurines of Lares, the typical household gods like the ones mentioned above, are placed on the table. But these are special because they carry lockets round their neck (they are *bullatos*). No images of Lares have occurred in Maltese archaeological contexts whereas several specimens were found in the Lararia of the Vesuvian cities and elsewhere. A Maltese connection, however, is found in the adjective *bullatos*. The *bulla* was an amuletic locket that was worn by Roman boys before they were assumed into adulthood, normally at sixteen years of age.[19] Many of us

17 Torelli (1992) 89-118.

18 As depicted by a well preserved marble statue probably from Rome in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (no RES.08.34a). http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/statue-of-priapus-151204 (accessed on 09/07/2014). On Priapus in Petronius see Rankin (1971) 52-57. For the general iconography of Priapus see Megow (1997).

19 On the *bulla* see Bonanno (2012).

Fig. 4: Statue of boy carrying a bulla at Domus Romana, Rabat, Malta

are familiar with this statue (fig. 4) of a young boy dressed in the typical Roman toga and with the bulla hanging on his chest. Circumstantial evidence suggests that this statue represented the future emperor Nero as a young boy of thirteen, before he assumed the *toga virilis* and was appointed senator by his adoptive father, the Emperor Claudius when he turned fourteen.[20]

At this stage Trimalchio's true portrait (*veram imaginem ipsius Trimalchionis*) is carried round the table for the guests to kiss. Encolpius admits that since all the other guests kissed the portrait, he is ashamed to let it pass without doing so. Such portraits were placed in the *tablinum* of the houses of the Roman upper middle class, but they usually represented the owner's ancestors (*imagines maiorum*), not the living owner himself. Since Trimalchio has no respectful ancestors to display their portraits, he displays one of himself.

That the Roman belief in the life after death was a reality, and not an invention by archaeologists in their interpretation of the grave goods found buried with the deceased, is confirmed by Trimalchio who, addressing his friend Habinnas, provides him with details of a funerary monument he has already instructed him to put up. He commissions a statue of himself with his little dog at his feet and wreaths and bottles of perfume ... "so that through your kindness I may live after death (*ut mihi contingat tuo beneficio post mortem vivere*)".

20 Bonanno (1997) 63; (1992) 23, pl. 25; (2005) 222-224.

Then follows the description of the commissioned funerary monument: a true and real mausoleum like the ones that still survive on the sides of the Via Appia or the so-called funerary monument of the Scipios outside Tarragona in Spain (fig. 5), or several others outside Palmyra in Syria (my pix). The monument is to have a facade (on the side of the street) of 100 feet (*in fronte pedes centum*), that is 32m, and twice as long on the sides (*in agrum pedes ducenti*). But Trimalchio is not happy with just the colossal building: he wants a grove (a fruit garden) around it; he wants fruits of all kinds and stretches of vines (*omne genus enim poma volo sint circa cineres meos, et vinearum largiter*). And, lest anyone might think this is a branch of botany, not archaeology, let me remind them that there is an extensive literature on the gardening of Roman houses and villas, especially the Vesuvian ones.[21]

Fig. 5: Tomb of Scipio, Tarragona, Spain

With regard to vines and vineyards it should be of interest to archaeologists to know that important developments are currently taking place in this field both in Malta and beyond. Limiting ourselves to Malta, the numerous strange rock-cut features, previously referred to as "pans", marking the rocky landscape of the Mġarr ix-Xini valley in Gozo, have since 2008 been securely identified as rudimentary wine-presses,[22] mostly by analogy to hundreds of similar features published in various parts of the Mediterranean,

21 For instance, Von Stackelberg (2009).

22 Bonanno (2008).

in particular those of Ferruzzano in Calabria.[23] The number of these wine-presses has been increasing since then.[24] Moreover, ancient vine trenches have recently been discovered in various excavations of Roman sites, in particular those of the Roman villa of Żejtun (some trenches being attributable even to pre-Roman agricultural activity)[25] and those at Tal-Ħotba, limits of Żejtun.[26]

Trimalchio wants the monument all for himself; he does not want to share it with his heirs. So he gives instructions for the following words to be added to his funerary inscription: *hoc monumentum heredem non sequatur* ("Let this monument not follow my heir"). It appears that this formula (*H.M.H.N.S.*) was not uncommon in Roman funerary inscriptions, though it has never been encountered in Malta, probably because no such monuments have ever been found there.

Notice that Trimalchio is not short of self respect. In his unmistakable vulgar style, he also takes the necessary measures to ascertain that he is not affronted even after death. He provides for a freedman of his to guard his tomb to prevent people from fouling it (*ne in monumentum meum populus cacatum currat*).

Trimalchio also sees to the sculptural paraphernalia of his sepulchral monument. He asks for images of ships in full sail to be carved on it (in relief or in the round, it is not specified, but probably the former) as well as an image of himself seated on a throne (*in tribunali sedentem*) wearing a *toga praetexta* (*praetextatum*) and five gold rings (*cum anulis aureis quinque*) and handing out money publicly out of a bag (*nummos in publico de sacculo effundentem*). In my view the best Roman funerary monument that illustrates in a similar fashion the career of its owner is the mausoleum of the Haterii family in the Vatican Museum, with its depiction of the treadmill crane the owner presumably used as a building contractor. We have to keep in mind that Trimalchio had been

23 Sculli (2002).

24 Single ones at Dwejra (Gozo), Wardija, near La Ferla Cross, and near the Misqa Tanks; three at It-Tafal ta' Binġemma; two at Il-Lippija. To which another one is to be added at San Ġużepp tat-Tarġa (thanks to a personal indication by Dr Anton Bugeja).

25 Bonanno and Vella (2014).

26 Pace et al. (2012) 66-69, fig. 4.

a member of the college of priests of Augustus (the *seviri Augustales*) who were allowed to sit on an official chair wearing the *toga praetexta*.

Trimalchio wants himself to be remembered for his generosity in throwing parties (such as the banquet in question). "Let a dining room be represented (*faciantur ... et triclinia*) but only if you think fit (*si tibi videtur*)". He does not forget his wife Fotunata and asks for a statue of her to be placed on his right (*ad dexteram meam ponas statuam Fortunatae meae*), holding a pigeon and leading a little dog (*columbam tenentem; et catellam cingulo alligatam ducat*). Although later on during the banquet, after a quarrel with her, he tells Habinnas not to put a statue of her on his tomb lest they would have quarrels even after his death.

But he also wants his favourite boy, whose dubious good looks have been described earlier in the narrative, to be shown in the group of sculptures. In the same breath he asks for capacious amphorae (*amphoras copiosas*) to be represented and adds an interesting archaeological detail. The amphorae should be shown sealed with gypsum, "so that wine may not run out" (*gypsatas, ne effluant vinum*). Such sealed amphorae do occasionally turn up in archaeological digs, even in shipwrecks. I do not remember any examples of these in the Maltese archaeological record but we do have a round stamped terracotta disc that probably once served as an amphora stopper . We also have another terracotta stamp, this time square in shape, which is inscribed in the negative and, therefore, was intended to be pressed against the gypsum or clay amphorae seals to mark the estate of production of the wine or, more likely, olive oil. The stamp records a certain Kaikilios (a Greek version of the Latin name Caecilius), the same name appearing on a Greek funerary inscription commemorating a man described as a Roman knight, *protos* (first citizen of the Maltese), patron, and *flamen* of the divine Augustus.[27]

Suddenly Trimalchio turns Romantic and asks for a broken amphora to be sculpted (*unam licet fractam sculpas*) with a boy weeping over it (*et*

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27 *CIG* 3, 5754. Now more easily accessible on the web in EDR (Epigraphic Database Rome) no. EDR112577 (*http://www.edr-edr.it/edr_programmi/res_complex_comune.php?do=book&id_nr=&provinz=&land=M&fo_antik=&Bibliografia=&Testo=&booltesto=AND&Testo2=&bool=AND&ordinamento=fo_modern&javasi=javascriptsi&se_foto=tutte&lang=eng* (accessed 09/07/2014).

super eam puerum plorantem). But a fraction of a second later he reverts to his usual self, with his obsession with time, and adds that a sundial should be placed in the middle (*horologium in medio*) so that anybody who want to see the time (*ut quisquis horas inspiciet*) whether they like it or not (*velit nolit*) will have to read his name (*nomen meum legat*) in the attached long and detailed inscription listing his good qualities, public positions held and huge wealth.

The Bath

After having wept and caused his wife, his guest Habinnas and his slaves to weep in anticipation of his own funeral, Trimalchio suddenly changes mood and invites his guests to join him and jump into the bath (*coniciamus nos in balneum*). This item, the *balneum*, requires some elucidation. Houses and villas of wealthy people all over the Roman Empire had their own heated bathing system, a miniature version of the large *thermae* meant for the general city population. It would have been opportune to illustrate existing examples from the Maltese context. I am pretty certain that the Roman Domus of Rabat had such a heated bathing set-up. Nothing of it survives, however, except the negative evidence: the *c.* 1 metre deep floors of a number of rectangular rooms to the north beyond the peristyle. These have the right depth for housing the *suspensurae* (columns or arches of fired clay bricks) to support the concrete floors and to allow the circulation of hot air provided by the furnace which must have been located on one side. A better preserved bathing system was identified in 1910 at the Roman villa of Ramla Bay, Gozo where the walls of the octagonal cold bath were covered with marble veneer.[28] A substantially larger format of a bathing complex at the site of Għajn Tuffieħa at the time of its discovery in 1929 still preserved a good number of the brick arches which supported the floor of the hot room (*caldarium*) and good sections of the floor mosaic of the changing room (*apudyterium*) and the cold bath (*frigidarium*).[29] So much so that we still refer to this site as the Roman Baths. Here we

28 Ashby (1915) 70-74.

29 Zammit (1930).

have the opposite situation: we have the bathing arrangement but not the residential building.

But the best example of a well preserved combination of a house (in this case a villa) and a bathing set-up I ever experienced at close quarters is that of Villa Seline on the Libyan coast between Tripoli and Lepcis Magna.[30] Apart from some beautiful mosaics and wall paintings, the villa stood out for the excellent state of preservation of the walls which survived to the height of a human being, or more, so that one could clearly make out the different sectors of the bathing arrangement the Romans were renowned for.

Fig. 6: Mosaic showing dog on leash from Marsala

30 Not to mention, naturally, the much larger and more impressive villas on both sides of the central Mediterranean, like the villa at Casale, near Piazza Armerina, in Sicily. I gratefully owe this experience to Dr Richard Vella Laurenti, then Ambassador of Malta in Tripoli, who in November 2002 invited me to lecture in Tripoli. On an excursion to Lepcis we stopped to visit the villa which was in the process of being excavated and restored by an Italian team of archaeologists.

Going back to our story, Encolpius and Ascyltos (the narrator and his friend) think that Trimalchio's bath is outside the house and they try to sneak out by the same door they have entered a few hours before, but they are scared off by a dog on a chain, a real one this time (fig. 6). They are led into an internal bath, like that of Villa Seline.

You would have thought that maritime archaeology could never, by any stretch of imagination, make an entry into this short story. It somehow manages to do so because Trimalchio's narration on how he has made his fortune reflects the reality of maritime archaeology of the Roman period. As a slim young slave from Asia for 14 years he was a source of pleasure for his master (*ad delicias [femina] ipsimi [domini] annos quattuordecim fui*) as well as for his mistress (*ego tamen et ipsimae [dominae] satis faciebam*). As soon as he inherited his master he built five ships, placed on them a cargo of wine – worth the equivalent of its weight in gold at the time – and sent them to Rome. But all five ships got wrecked. Trimalchio did not give up. He built some more ships, bigger and better and loaded them with a cargo of wine, lard, beans, perfumes, and slaves. While on his first attempt, with the loss of his cargo and five ships, Neptune had deprived Trimalchio of 30 million sesterces at one go (*uno die Neptunus trecenties sestertium devoravit*), on his second attempt he made ten million on one voyage (*uno cursu centies sestertium corrotundavi*).

I stop here with this account to remark on how faithfully this part of the account reflects the reality that maritime archaeologists experience. Shipwrecks with Roman cargoes are countless and they increase with new discoveries every year;[31] and the Maltese islands have their fair share of them.[32] They virtually always contain cargoes of amphorae, mostly wine and olive oil, but also of salted fish and fish sauce. I do not

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31 Parker (1992) catalogued 1189 shipwrecks around 80% of which dated to from the second century BC to the 10th century AD. By the end of the 20th century the estimate increased to over 1500. See Gibbins (2001) 295.We ourselves have so often had the opportunity of listening to the underwater archaeologist in our Department, Dr Timothy Gambin, enriching us with his experiences of new discoveries of Roman shipwrecks, such as those off the island of Ventotene.

32 A map showing the locations of the then known underwater archaeological relics around Malta was published in the preliminary report of the *Missione Italiana a Malta* for 1964, fig. 1. See also Atauz (2008).

think I have ever heard or read any suggestion that amphorae might have contained bacon or lard, or even beans, though these might have been transported in some other, more perishable containers.

Perfumes, of course, were transported in smaller containers, like *unguentaria,* which are not absent in the archaeological record of shipwrecks. But what about slaves? It would be asking too much to expect to come by human bone remains in shipwrecks but I wonder whether chains for keeping slaves under control on sea voyages have ever been encountered. Slaves were an important commodity for the Roman economy and society. There was a thriving trade of slaves all over the Empire, but another small island, this time in the centre of another Mediterranean sea, Delos in the Aegean, had one of its economic booms based on the trading of slaves.

The whole episode of Trimalchio's banquet comes to an end when he decides to enact his own funeral and asks his guests to imagine they were invited to his funeral. He first opens a flask and anoints all the guests and says: "I hope I shall like this as well in the grave as I do on earth". Again this is a clear and direct reference to the belief among the Greeks and Romans in the life beyond the grave, and to the use of perfumes in mortuary rituals, reflected in the frequent burial of perfume bottles among the grave goods.These appear mostly in a standard form of elongated ceramic, relatively small, bottles currently called *unguentaria,*that can hardly stand on their base. On rare occasions bottles for the same purpose occur in faience (or glass paste) of Egyptian inspiration. Around the mid-1st century BC, with the widespread use of blown glass, the ceramic perfume bottles are replaced by blown glass ones of various sizes, but mostly of the same shape. (fig. 7). They tend to have a wide round body at the base and a very long neck on top of that. Since earlier Punic tombs were often reused in Roman times, these blown glass bottles are a good indicator for the archaeologist of Roman, rather than Punic, date for such burials.

At this point in time in the story, some trumpeters enter the dining room and Trimalchio stretches himself on his presumed death couch saying: 'Imagine that I am dead. Play something nice' (*Fingite me... mortuum esse. Dicite aliquod belli*). To which the trumpeters sound a loud funeral march (*consonuere cornicines funebri strepitu*). This reminds

Fig. 7: Group of glass *unguentaria*

me how intensely archaeologists emphasize that funerary rituals are probably more for the living than for the deceased and that music must have played an important role in death rituals, at least of those whose kin could afford it. If only the Archaeology of Death could also find the means to reconstruct such performances the discipline would be taking decisive steps forward in the realization of an Archaeology of the Senses as promoted by the book with that title by Robin Skeates.[33]

Returning for the last time to our story, the loud noise of the trumpets provokes the intervention of the fire brigade. Profiting from the confusion that followed, our three heroes take to their heels and escape around midnight into the dark streets of their hosting town.

Conclusion

I very often wonder how readers of the ancient classical texts projected in their own minds the world of classical antiquity before the onset of archaeology from the 18th century onwards. The discovery of the physical world of classical Greece and Rome started in earnest, albeit gradually and in limited geographical areas, mostly in Italy, in the Renaissance, with the emergence from the ground of works of art like the Laocoon and the Apollo Belvedere. Before that, it was the ancient structures surviving above ground, like the Parthenon and the

33 Skeates (2010).

Hephaisteion in Athens and the Pantheon and the Colosseum in Rome, that could be experienced firsthand and could project the authentic appearance of such features as mentioned in classical texts.

It is easy to see how distorted the physical appearance of things, like clothing and armour, was in the Middle Ages by a quick overview of their representation in Medieval paintings and sculpture. It started to get gradually better in the Renaissance, but even in the Baroque age painters like Caravaggio still portrayed heroes and divinities of classical antiquity dressed in the fashion of his own time. It improved enormously and came very close to a faithful depiction of the ancient world with the Neoclassical and Romantic movements, no doubt as a result of the physical discovery of that world by archaeology.

With the above exercise I have tried to show how the reading of ancient texts could be better brought to life and made more relevant to the present by illustrating them, not with fanciful Renaissance, Baroque or Neo-Classical paintings or sculptures, but by authentic, original archaeological documents.

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